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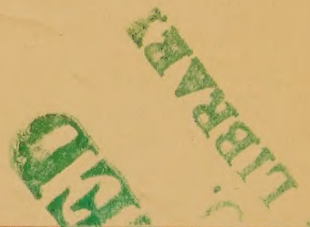

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8-37

Susan Roth

POTATO FACE

By CARL SANDBURG

AUTHOR OF "ROOTABAGA COUNTRY," "SELECTED POEMS," "ABRAHAM LINCOLN: THE PRAIRIE YEARS," ETC.

The genius of nonsense in man long ago gave rise to the gargoyle, to the humor that rests us from tragedy. Some who have read these new Rootabaga stories consider the Potato Face a speaking, living gargoyle. Potato Face tells stories that are nothing else but story telling, clowning, making fun. Yet some of them range around profound matters.

In the biggest village of the Rootabaga country, the Potato Face Blind Man sits with his accordion on the corner nearest the post office. Sometimes he finds in himself the whole human procession and what he sees and hears is in these stories.

Half a dozen of Sandburg's earlier Rootabaga stories are already in school readers. Leon Bazalgette translated them for wide popularity in France. That a mid-west radio station, WGN, has broadcast the story of "The Rag Doll and the Broom Handle" thirty-two times in five years is an evidence of wide appeal.

POTATO FACE

By the same author

POETRY

SMOKE AND STEEL

SLABS OF THE SUNBURNT WEST

GOOD MORNING, AMERICA

SELECTED POEMS
Edited by Rebecca West

SONGS

THE AMERICAN SONGBAG

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FOR CHILDREN

ABE LINCOLN GROWS UP

ROOTABAGA STORIES

ROOTABAGA PIGEONS

ROOTABAGA COUNTRY

Potato Face

BY CARL SANDBURG

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

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PREFACE

THE rootabaga, as all farmers know, is in size perhaps the greatest vegetable that grows. And it is in the Rootabaga Country, and in the biggest village of that country, the Potato Face Blind Man sits with his accordion on the corner next nearest the post office. There he sits with his eyes never looking out and always searching in. And sometimes he finds in himself the whole human procession. When he asks, "Who are you?" it is almost as though he should say, "Who am I?" Once he tied a sign to his left arm reading, "I Am Blind, *Too*," just as though the many people who might pass by that day and read the sign could see no more *with* eyes than *without*. This, of course, was the jest of a blind man, though he may have meant he felt sad and sorry for the people who having eyes believe that because they have eyes they see, which may not always be so. He

seemed to believe, did the Potato Face, that he had seen all the vegetables, animals, jewels, stars, fishes, people that they had—and then some more besides. In fact, he sometimes indicates that when he needs an animal or fool not yet seen or heard of, he can make it for himself and give it a character so it is real to him, and when he talks about it and tells its story, it is like telling about one of his own children. He seems to love some of the precious things that are cheap, such as stars, the wind, pleasant words, time to be lazy, and fools having personality and distinction. He knows, it seems, that young people are young, no matter how many years they live; that there are children born old and brought up to be full of fear; that a young heart keeps young by a certain measure of fooling as the years go by; that men and women old in years sometimes keep a fresh child heart and, to the last, salute the dawn and the morning with a mixture of reverence and laughter.

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POTATO FACE

YONDER THE YINDER

ONE MORNING the Potato Face Blind Man was talking different kinds of talk with the two girls, Morningstar and Moongold.

He told them about the ten bag thieves who had stolen bags and didn't know what to put in the bags.

He told them about two men who stole a horse and afterward stole haystacks of hay to feed the horse.

He told them about a man who stole a front door, traded it for a back door, and used the back door for a window because he already had a back door.

He told them about the thief who stole a hunk of coal, traded it for a hunk of ice, and the ice melted and he didn't have any

more than he did before he stole the coal.

He told about the five thieves who stole smoke and tried to sell the smoke but couldn't and then all said to each other, "Let's stop stealing smoke if we can't sell it."

Then he turned his face towards the sky and made signs with his fingers like a fish swimming, like a duck ducking under water, like a goose walking first on one foot and then another, like a rag picker picking rags, like two rag pickers picking autumn leaves and saying, "Leaf by leaf the leaves are falling."

Then he told the girls, "One of the five smoke thieves came past here this morning and gave me a *yodo* to keep for him. I give it to you to keep for me."

He told them more, "The smoke thief said this is the last *yodo* in the world. So take care of it. You can walk and walk as far as you can walk, ride and ride as far as you can ride, then you can eat and sleep and get a long rest and

start walking and riding again as far as you can walk and ride. But you'll never find another *yodo*. This is the last *yodo*. That's what the smoke thief said, after telling me that all five of the smoke thieves have quit stealing smoke because they can't sell it."

Then Morningstar and Moongold started for home and when they reached home they saw sitting on the front steps a long spike of a boy with a burning bean for a head, and his eyes full of spears, spads and spitches.

First he sneers at them. Then he leers. Then he jeers. And the burning bean burns all the more as he sneers, leers and jeers.

The girls ask him, "Who are you?" He answers, "I am Yonder the Yinder, sometimes called Yonder the Yinder the Yoo."

Then they make up questions to ask him. And he makes up answers. But he makes up the answers so fast they hardly know what he is answering. Sometimes his answers come so fast the girls are mixed up and befuddled and bam-

boozled. This is the way they talked back and forth, shooting their questions and answers:

"Where do you come from?" "Yesterday."

"Where are you going?" "Tomorrow."

"Is that so?" "Yes, quite such, and a cup of coffee, immediately, if not sooner."

"Who said you could?" "I took it."

"What did you do with it?" "I lost it."

"Who got it back for you?" "Fire and air?"

"Did you forget anything?" "Yes, mud, I am a hunk of mud and six pails of water."

"And how many animals?" "Dozens and dozens, millions and millions."

"How could you think so?" "I bought it."

"Where did you get the money?" "The money was fixed."

"Why do you always shadow us?" "I am a peanut, a proud, peculiar peanut."

"Are you going to sit here all night on our front steps?" "Tonight, tomorrow night, the next night and the next and after that to the end of the world."

And because Yonder the Yinder's answers were so cold and so peculiar, the two girls Morningstar and Moongold began shivering. The more he talked the more they shivered. They ran into the house shivering.

They put a frying pan on the stove, broke eggs into the pan, and were watching the pan of eggs frying when they saw the kitchen lighting up with spears, spads and spitches of light.

They turned to look and there was Yonder the Yinder with a burning bean for a head, sneering, leering, jeering.

He stepped up to the stove and said to the eggs in the pan, "Hello, eggs."

Then he went on, speaking to the eggs, "How do you do, eggs? And how does it feel to get out of your egg shell?"

And he goes on, "Do you know, eggs, I used to be an egg, and when I was an egg I was the Egg of Eggs?"

By this time Morningstar and Moongold

were shivering again, and they asked, "Who let you in?"

He said, "I told you I was a peanut, my father was a proud, peculiar peanut long before me. And because he was an egg I was an egg. And I am like him because he was a long spike and he had a burning bean for a head and his eyes were full of spears, spads and spitches. When you asked me who I am I told you I am Yonder the Yinder sometimes called Yonder the Yinder the Yoo."

Then he told them, "I have come to take that *yodo* the Potato Face Blind Man gave you. I heard him say the smoke thief said it is the last *yodo* in the world. If anything is the last of anything I want it and nobody can stop me from taking it."

He snatched the *yodo* and was gone and they couldn't tell whether he had gone through a window, through a door or a keyhole in the door, or whether he slid under the door.

While the eggs were frying the girls were

crying. They went to bed feeling bad, they woke up feeling bad, because they remembered what the smoke thief had told the Potato Face Blind Man. They could walk and walk, ride and ride, as far as they could walk and ride, to the ends of the world, and they could eat and sleep and get rested and walk and ride again to the ends of the world, and they would never find another *yodo* because there was only one *yodo* in the whole world. And now Yonder the Yinder was gone and the *yodo* gone with him.

In the morning the girls put a frying pan on the stove, broke eggs in the pan, and were watching the pan of eggs frying, when they saw the kitchen lighting up with spears, spads and spitches of light.

They turned to look and there was Yonder the Yinder with a burning bean for a head, leering, sneering and jeering.

He told them, "Here is a *yodo*, and here is another and another and another," till he counted five *yodos*. He told them, "Every one

of those five smoke thieves had a *yodo*. Why do I want a *yodo* if every sneaking, slinking smoke thief has a *yodo?*"

Then he spoke to the eggs in the pan, "Good-by, eggs, farewell, eggs, au revoir and auf wiedersehen, adios and over-the-river, eggs," and was gone, and they didn't know whether he was gone through a window, through a door, or a keyhole in the door, or whether he slid under the door.

And Morningstar and Moongold hugged each other because they were glad. And that morning as they were frying they were not crying.

And when that morning they gave the Potato Face Blind Man the five *yodos*, he said, "That is the last time I will believe what a smoke thief tells me. I won't even believe they have stopped stealing smoke because they can't sell the smoke."

The girls were asking, "What does a *yodo* do? What can we do with a *yodo?*"

The old man turned his face toward the sky and made signs with his fingers like a fish swimming, like a duck ducking under water, like a goose walking first on one foot and then on the other, like a rag picker picking rags, like two rag pickers picking autumn leaves and saying, "Leaf by leaf the leaves are falling."

Then he said, "*If you have a yodo you can look better while you listen, and listen better while you look. But if you haven't got a yodo you can't.*"

"Oh," said Morningstar. "Oh," said Moongold. And they started home and when they got home, there sitting on the front steps, was Yonder the Yinder, sometimes called Yonder the Yinder the Yoo. But they walked right past him and refused to speak.

And he sits there and begins to laugh—with a burning bean for a head. And the more he laughs the more the burning bean burns. First it burns red, then blue, then back to red. And sometimes as it changes slowly back from blue

to red, he says, "If you have a *yodo* you can look better while you listen, and listen better while you look. But if you haven't got a *yodo* you can't."

MOONLIGHT, SPIDERS, RATS AND ELEPHANTS

ONE spring night a high wind was blowing white clouds across the sky. And sometimes the white wool of the clouds rolled apart. And the moonlight came shining through.

Three girls came skipping along trying to make foot tracks in the moonlight as if it were snow. And they spoke to the Potato Face Blind Man sitting in front of the post office. They told him about the moonlight and the white wool clouds.

They said, "We are the Balloon sisters. Our father is the balloon man who makes the balloons."

The Potato Face said he had been wondering for a long time who makes the balloons

and he was glad to meet the Balloon sisters.

The littlest one said, "I put the yellow in the yellow balloons." And the next, "I put the red in the red balloons." And the biggest one, "I put the blue in the blue balloons."

"Then who puts the green in the green balloons?" the old man asked. "Where is she?"

The sisters answered, "Tomorrow is the day for green balloons and she is home getting the green ready."

The old man fumbled his accordion, looked up at the sky where the white wool of the clouds was rolling apart, and moonlight came shining through and he murmured, "I believe you. I believe anything this evening. I dreamed last night the moon fell off the sky and I ran out and picked it up and put it on the sky again."

Then the girls asked the old man to tell them all about spiders, all about rats, all about elephants. He turned his face up in the white moonlight toward the wool-white clouds. "I

can't tell you all, that would take too long. You have to be home early. I can tell you only a little about spiders, rats and elephants."

And with his face toward the sky, thinking a little while, he said, "Which is it, spiders first?" All three of the Balloon sisters said, "Spiders first."

So the Potato Face begins telling about Spiders—

When a spider is a baby, the spider father and mother wait to give it a name till it is big enough to count numbers. Then they let the little spider pick out a number instead of a name. They write the number on paper.

All spiders carry their numbers between their toes. If they forget or get mixed up on their numbers they open the slip of paper between their toes and read the number. When two spiders meet, the first they ask is, "What's your number?"

Whenever a spider spins a cobweb he puts

his number on it, all except the bell spiders who put bells on their cobwebs, little bells that go ling-ling, ling-ling so soft we can hardly hear them.

The moon spiders are always spinning webs to catch the moon. On a moonlight night like tonight the hay-fields are full of webs with moon spiders sitting under them hoping the moon will fall into their webs.

Once in the time of the new moon I saw the moon shining on a rainpool, and over it six moon spiders had spun their webs hoping the moon would fall *up*. I read the numbers they spun on the cobwebs. They were high numbers, high up in the billions, trillions, quintillions, octillions, and higher than that, numbers so high I couldn't read them. Ever since then I have said the spiders know more about numbers than we do. I would rather have any long name, hard for the tongue to say, than such high numbers as some spiders have, hard for the head to think up.

I heard a spider saying to a grasshopper, "When you want to go up or down you jump but a spider throws a ladder out of his mouth up or down whichever way he wants to go."

I heard the same spider saying to a fly, a flea and a floo, "When you want to sleep you find a corner and make a bed, but a spider throws a hammock out of his mouth and goes to sleep in it with the wind swinging him bye-bye, bye-bye, back and forth, over and over."

I heard two long golden spiders one morning talking in a garden. One was saying, "Last night, because you asked me, I tried to reach the big orange moon and bring down orange moon silk for you. I climbed to the top of the highest hollyhock in the garden, and standing there I tried to throw a ladder up to the moon. But I didn't get halfway. My ladder broke and I fell down among webs of the bell spiders and went to sleep in a hammock with bells on, little bells going ling-ling, ling-ling as I was going to sleep. When I woke up the moon was no longer

an orange moon; it was only a lemon peeling; I climbed the highest hollyhock again, and looked up the sky, but the moon was only a thin shaving of pale cheese; I slept and climbed again but the moon was gone, so after my next sleep I didn't climb any more."

And the Potato Face stops telling about Spiders—

"Now you can go home," said the Potato Face to the girls. "You have heard enough about spiders."

"What about the rats?" said the girls. "Oh," chuckled the old man.

So the Potato Face begins telling about Rats—

I don't want to tell you about the rats we make rat soup of. I don't want to tell you about the rats we cut the tails off to get rat-tails. I don't want to tell you about the ice-pick rats that pick ice with ice picks nor the corkscrew rats with corkscrew teeth for pulling corks.

I don't want to tell you about the rats that fight rat-dogs and chew the ears off rat terriers, nor the fat rats that chase fat bats nor the lean rats that spit in cats' faces and hiss, "Come on and fight if you want to."

I don't want to tell you about the corner rats that live in corner houses and eat the corners out of handkerchiefs.

I don't want to tell you about the square rats that sleep in square boxes nor the round rats that sleep in round baskets, nor the long-tailed rats that wrap their tails in nice little packages before they go to sleep nor the other long-tailed rats that curl their tails around a trapeze and sleep swinging with their heads down all night.

I want to tell you about the blue plush rat that lives in the blue snow far north. When one of them says to another, "I want to sit down on a sofa," the other rat makes a blue plush sofa of himself. They rub their blue plush backs with the blue plush brushes on the ends of their tails; they are smooth rats, the smoothest of all, these blue plush rats.

I want to tell you about the ladder rats. They like ladders to eat. They will walk, miles, up or down, for a ladder. When they want to go up they make a ladder, six rats high, sixteen rats high, or six hundred rats high, as high up as they want to go. The longer the rats the longer the ladder. They play tag up and down ladders. When they eat a ladder they start eating at the top, going down till the ladder is gone. After that they don't play tag on that ladder any more.

I want to tell you about the red leather rats with red hats. They wear red leather coats and red leather shoes. When they meet other rats they take off their red hats to show respect. If another rat bites at them they take the bite in the red coat, slip out of the coat and leave it in the mouth of the other rat. Then they take off their red leather shoes, knock the other rat down with the shoes and run away. When they die they are buried in their red hats, and all the other rats at the funeral wear red hats.

I can tell you about rats who wash their faces, rats who wash their feet, and still other rats who wash not only the face and the feet but the tail and the neck and the ears.

I can tell you about rats who make promises and keep them, and other rats that say yes when they mean no and a million when they mean a hundred, and Saturday when they mean Tuesday, and winter when they mean summer.

I had a somersault rat that turned front somersaults when I counted forward 7, 8, 9, and back somersaults when I counted backward, 9, 8, 7.

I had a handspring rat that turned handsprings, and a canoe rat that made its own rat canoe, and a cuckoo rat that fixed its own cuckoo clock and whenever my clock was wrong he fixed my clock so the cuckoo was okeh again. After fixing a cuckoo clock he always climbed on top of it and cuckooed himself just to show that a rat can cuckoo.

I had a hissing rat once that could hiss so

you heard him a mile. I had a musical rat that could sing if it was fed on the wood of a violin; I had two doughnut rats that had to have two doughnuts a day to live on; they always crawled through the hole of a doughnut before they would eat a bite of it. I had a talking rat once that was ready to talk whenever I fed it a talking frog.

My best pet rats were the alphabeticals. One shaped like the letter O rolled along like a hoop. P and T hopped along on one leg. The S rat and the Z had thick pads on their bottom sides and they padded and slid along. X was a four-legged rat that was upside down whichever way he stood; he could dance jigs on either end. H was a little ladder rat that the other rats hopped up on when they wanted to get higher up.

I could tell you about an X rat who carries a book to read and whenever he comes to a word with an X in it he fixes his teeth in the X, bites it out of the book, and then writes in

his own handwriting on the bottom of the page, "If you can't find what you're looking for, look for what you *can* find."

I could tell you about a bitter green rat who gets more bitter and more green every day in the week from saying, "I hope you croak, I hope you choke!" I could tell you about mad rats that wear hats and want to fight all other rats that don't wear hats. I could tell you about a rat with a sack who goes around saying, "The sack is yours or anything in the sack." I could tell you about a harmonica rat who plays *Home Sweet Home* on the harmonica till everybody in the family lights a candle and goes upstairs to bed, saying first, "Good night and sweet dreams! sweet dreams!"

So now you can go home, you have heard enough about spiders and enough about rats, the Potato Face Blind Man told the Balloon sisters.

And the Potato Face stopped telling about Rats—

"Elephants," the girls were all saying.

And the Potato Face begins telling about Elephants—

I will tell you some other time, some other moonlight night, about the elephants who put everything in their trunks, lock the trunks, throw the keys away, make new keys, and never use the same key twice. They wear keys around their necks and ask each other, "Have you seen my new keys?"

And I will tell you some other time about the elephants who carry chalk, and stand still like blackboards, and write spelling and arithmetic on each others' sides.

And I must tell you, some other time, about the little elephant who wiggles when he walks, wiggles when he talks, talks when he walks and stops talking when he stops walking. And I will tell you, surely some other time, about the little elephant who is always drawing blackbirds on blackboards and asking, "Who blacked

the blackbird, who blacked the blackboard, and how much blacking is there left?"

I wish I could tell you now about all these elephants. I would tell you about the elephants who stand on the bottom of the sea and squirt water up into big towers and waterspouts that turn boats upside down and spill people out into the ocean when they are half asleep. I would tell you about the elephants with little bird houses under the big flaps of their big ears, with little birds to tell them when to get up in the morning, what to eat for breakfast, when to go to work, when to come home, when to go to bed, or last of all the littlest bird of all who tells the elephant any names, numbers or faces he forgets.

I want to tell you tonight, if you believe me, if you let me, if you give me half a chance, if you love me half a bushel and if you will listen half a minute, about the big elephant, Oompah. I saw him once, with whiskers so long that sixteen little elephants walk ahead of him carry-

ing the whiskers, combing the whiskers, and picking the hay and the weeds and the cockleburrs out of the whiskers. Five fast long-legged elephants travel along to chase the rabbits and sparrows out of the whiskers. Two long tusks of teeth stick out in front of Oompah and each tusk has two little elephants to scrub it with soap and shine it with chamois every morning till it shines like a looking glass. Riding on top of Oompah, on the head and the back and the tail, are twenty more little elephants with squirt guns, and they squirt mud and throw mudballs and mud pies into the faces and eyes of anybody who wants to fight with Oompah.

He sleeps a year at a time, Oompah does, and then gets up and eats his breakfast in January, walks around till summer when he eats a big dinner, and then in December he eats his supper and goes to sleep for another year. Oompah, they say, is the oldest old-timer of all the elephants, the greatest great-great-grandfather of all the elephants in the world. And he never

fights, he never works, he never thinks, he never even blinks, he never even writes letters and ends them "Please let me hear from you, Yours respectfully." He lets the others do these things for him. He sleeps and eats for himself because nobody can sleep and eat for him.

He never talks but one day in the year, and then he says all day long, "I am the oldest four-legged quadruped ever born on land or sea or ever seen or heard of among the sun-swept, wind-bitten archipelagoes of the seven seas. I am Oompah, the first and last of the elephants and nobody knows where the elephants came from unless they ask me. I am Oompah, O-o-o-o-m-p-a-h, O—o—o—o—m—p—a—h." Three times, just like that, telling everybody who he is, he yawns and y-a-w-n-s those words on the day he goes to sleep. He is half asleep and talking sleep-talk before he goes to sleep.

Now the old Potato Face stopped telling about Elephants—

The Balloon sisters were yawning, putting their hands over the mouth to cover the yawns, or wrapping the yawns in their handkerchiefs to look at the next morning to see how a yawn looks if you wrap it in a handkerchief.

The Potato Face turned his eyes toward the sky where a high wind was blowing white clouds across the sky, and sometimes the white wool of the clouds rolled apart, and the moonlight came shining through till again the wind piled clouds over the moon and it was dark. He told the girls, "Go home now, love me half a bushel, remember me when you eat breakfast, and if you want to sleep just think about O-o-o-o-m-p-a-h."

And the girls kissed him on the nose, one by one, without saying a word. Then they started home, the biggest one first, saying, "I put the blue in the blue balloons," the next biggest next, "I put the red in the red balloons," and the littlest one last, saying, "I put the yellow in the yellow balloons—and it's a secret."

THE SPINK BUG AND THE HUCK

A SPINK bug living in a limb on the end of a salimber tree climbed out one morning from the knot-hole where he lived.

It was a big morning for him because never before was he away from the knot-hole where everything was homey and homelike.

His father, his forefathers, and four forefathers of his forefathers, had all lived there before him in the knot-hole on the limb of a salimber tree.

It was all spick and span because the wives of his father and his forefathers, as well as the four wives of the four forefathers, all were spick and span lady spink bugs.

The spink bug climbed out of the knot-hole because he had a hunch, and for days the hunch

had been hunching him in the ribs, the feet, the head.

When the hunch hunched it said to him with a whisper, "Vamoose, vamoose, vamoose."

And like always when a hunch keeps on hunching a spink bug, saying three times over, "Vamoose, vamoose, vamoose," he climbed out of the knot-hole in the limb on the end of the salimber tree.

He rolled himself into a ball, let go of himself, dropped down onto a flat rock and went bumping bump-bump-bumpety.

Though inside of him he was leather and molasses, on the outside he was rubber and he knew it was the rubber sending him up and down, bump-bump-bumpety.

First he bumped high, then not so high, fifty times, till at last he wasn't bumping any more.

And he settled down.

And everything was still.

And there was nothing to be afraid of.

He knew that.

Away inside of him the spink bug was thinking, "I am done bumping. The bumps are over. I have ceased to be a bumper."

He said, "I'm a package. I guess I'll unwrap me."

And he unloosened the leather outside of him, and racked and wriggled it up into a bundle on top of his back for a hump.

He scrunched himself till the molasses all ran into jugs hanging along his ribs.

And he went on unloosening, scrunching, wrapping and unwrapping till he wasn't a ball any more.

He was a bug.

At last he was a regular bug like all regular bugs.

He stayed still listening.

"If my hunch is hunching, it will hunch me something," he said.

So he listened more.

He didn't see anything nor smell anything nor feel anything.

But he did hear his hunch.

The hunch was saying, "Open your glims, you gazook."

So he listened more.

Then he said, "Now I'll pop my glims out."

And when he was ready he popped his glims out—one floop and he scrunched and squeezed them out in front of his head.

Now he could see.

Where everything had been dark now it was light.

And he looked down on the outside of himself and he saw he was covered with splashes and alphabets.

And he sat down and looked at himself a long time, running his eyes along the splashes and the alphabets.

And he liked the looks of himself and said, "I am something to look at with these white splashes and black alphabets on the outside of my ribs where there are jugs of molasses hanging inside."

And he had a good time sitting and looking at himself and enjoying his looks.

Now—along came a huck.

And the huck was exactly like the spink bug, only he was covered with spots and numbers.

For every white splash of the spink bug the huck had a white spot.

And instead of the spink bug's black alphabets on the outside of his ribs the huck had black numbers.

So they stood looking at each other, each saying to himself, "Where did this come from?"

And each was saying, "He is the same as me, only different, and I hate him because he is different, and I hope I will never be like him because if I am I will like him, and I want to hate him."

"Are you proud you got spots and numbers?" said the spink bug to the huck. "I hate your spots! I hate your numbers."

"Are you proud you got splashes and alpha-

bets?" said the huck to the spink bug. "I hate your splashes! I hate your alphabets!"

And they stood looking at each other, each one bragging how good he was.

It was the first time a spink had ever met a huck though he had heard about hucks.

And it was the first time a huck had ever met a spink though he had heard about spinks.

They snarled and spit at each other.

They whined and whanged at each other.

They decided to fight.

Never having seen each other before, the way to find out who was who and which was which, was to fight.

Then they stopped, hesitated, paused, deliberated, held counsel with each other saying, "Even if we are different we are the same."

They decided they would talk before fighting.

And by talking they would find out why they were going to fight.

So they talked.

They talked about salimber trees and the homes in the limbs of salimber trees.

They talked about snow and rain and sunshine and the wind in the leaves of the salimber tree.

They talked about two redbirds singing and whistling and building a home high in the limbs of the salimber tree.

They talked about worms, measuring off inches inch by inch, green worms on the green leaves, far up in the limbs of the salimber tree.

They talked about January and February and ice like glass and sleet like silver crystals, up on the forks and branches of the salimber tree.

They talked about May and June and the buds and the shoots and the dazzling white blossoms and the new smells that came to the bark of the salimber tree.

They talked about September and October and the green leaves changing to yellow and saffron and gold and falling, falling, in a grand

good-bye for that year to the limbs of the salimber tree.

They talked about the winter sky, so often dark and gray, yet sometimes so blue and so clean that there was a shaking of life and promises in the limbs of the salimber trees.

They talked about the summer sky and the few stars early in the evening and the many more stars that came, too many to count, later in the evening, and how the white stars spread out on the black sky like alphabets and numbers on a vast umbrella held high up over the salimber tree.

And the more they talked—the spink bug and the huck—about the salimber tree and the homes in the salimber tree—the more they forgot to find out why they were going to fight.

If they had not stopped to talk they would have fought the fight they decided to fight.

Inside of them, hunches were saying, "Vamoose, vamoose, vamoose."

And they were getting sleepy.

The spink bug said, "I am going home. Shall I write you a letter sometimes in the gloaming when the thoughts come?"

"Yes," said the huck, "and I'll write you a letter sometimes in the gloaming when the thoughts come."

So they went home, the spink bug by himself, with his splashes and alphabets, and the huck by himself, with his spots and numbers, each one of them back to a knot-hole in a limb on the end of a salimber tree, each one to write the other his thoughts in the gloaming.

QUISH AND QUEE

A BOY named Quish and a girl named Quee came skating on roller skates one morning up to the post office where the Potato Face sat playing an old piece, "Why, Oh, Why, Do the Bumblehummers Always Go Bumbling and Humming?"

And Quish and Quee began talking with the Old Man. And they asked him what is the difference between bumbling and humming and whether the bumblehummers know when they bumble and when they hum, and whether the bumble must always come before the hum, no matter what happens.

And the Old Man then explained for Quish and Quee how he used to listen to humbumblers who always hum before they bumble, no matter what happens, and the only difference between

bumblehummers and humbumblers is whether the hum or the bumble comes first.

Then Quish and Quee teased for a story. Quish said he had been a good boy and done the right things with his right hand and the left things with his left hand. Quee said she had been a good girl standing up when she stood and sitting down when she sat.

"I can't tell you a story," said the Potato Face. "I can only tell you remembers, one remember and two remembers and so on like that, one after another."

"All we ask for is a couple of remembers," said Quish and Quee as they took off their roller skates so as to stand easier while listening.

And the Potato Face told these remembers—

I remember long ago one day on a misty moisty morning when cloudy was the weather, I chanced to meet an old man all clothed in leather, and he began to compliment and I

began to grin. And he told me where the leather came from his clothes were made of. And he told me why he began to compliment and why I began to grin. And if I had stayed to listen he would have told me why the morning was misty and moisty. But I had to be going. I was already late and if I stayed to listen I would be later yet.

I remember I met another man that day. He had long arms. He was in bed one morning, he said, when he looked out of the window and saw the sky was falling. He slid out of bed and ran to the window and looked up again at the sky falling and then said to himself, "If the sky is falling, I must run out of the house and push it back and hold it up so it won't fall."

And he ran to his clothes and started fast to jump into his clothes in a hurry. Then he stopped and began to go slow, saying to himself, "Why should I hurry? I don't have to

hurry. Hurry isn't for me. Hurry is no worry of mine. It will take a long time for the sky to fall."

So he took it easy and went slow. He got into his shirt slow and easy. He put on his shoes slow and easy. He tied his shoestrings first one way and then another till his shoestrings were tied in the exact knot he wanted. After tying his necktie one way he went back and tied it another. And when at last he had his clothes on he was saying, "Why should I hurry? Hurry is no worry to me. It will take the sky a long time to fall."

Then he went out and began pushing the sky back and holding it up higher than it was before. Then he fixed it so the sky would stay up and not fall down any more.

When he came home that morning and looked at his arms he saw they were longer than they used to be, much longer. And when people asked him why his arms were longer he told

about seeing the sky falling that morning and how he pushed it back and held it up higher than it was before.

When he told it to me he said, "My arms were longer ever after, much longer ever after." I got my ears full of what he was saying. And when I saw him walking along the street, I noticed his arms were so long, and the elbows came so far down, I used to wonder where he kept his hands. He went into the post office one morning and asked if there were any letters, as he reached out his hands ahead of the six people ahead of him and put his hands through the postoffice window. And the postmaster gave him a bundle of letters and he took them and went away ahead of the six people ahead of him. He knocked off the hats of the six people ahead of him, but he said "Excuse me" real fast and reached and picked up all the hats and put them on the heads they belonged to before any one else could reach and pick up a hat.

I remember I went with him out of the post-

office and walked with him to the corner store where he reached up to the highest shelf and took down a box for him and me to sit on. He opened the first letter in the bundle, and then the next and so on, till he read them all to me.

All the letters were from the same man, locked in an ice box, and beginning each letter, "I am locked in an ice box. Sometimes my fingers freeze and I write with my toes. When my toes freeze I write with my fingers again."

One letter said, "Where I am they lock in and lock out, they lock up and they lock down. On the doors they have locks, on the windows more locks, and when they let the smoke out they unlock the chimneys. The pantries have double lock-locks, the ice boxes have triple lock-lock-locks. And sometimes in a house they take off all the locks and lock them with the biggest lock-lock of all into a big lockbox full of padlocks, sliplocks, sniplocks, snaplocks, switchlocks, hang locks, hook locks, hatch locks, foot locks, leg locks, wrist locks, box locks, big

locks for locking big elephants, little locks for locking little lizards."

Longarms read to me from one letter, "Every once in a while five or six rats run out of their corners and stand up on their hind legs and make faces at each other and chatter 'Fight! fight! fight! who wants to fight?' And sometimes they fight. And sometimes they only make faces."

One letter told how sixteen striped rats marched out from a corner one night. The head of the rats stood at the head of the line and looked down to the tail of the rats who stood at the tail of the line. And he yelled, "Is everybody ready?" and got the answer, "Yes, let's go!" And again he yelled, "Is everybody ready *now?*" and got the answer like a flash again, "Yes, everybody's ready *now!*" Then the head of the rats made six sinuous motions like six cylindrical serpents and they all turned flip-flops into a pot of snake-foot soup, and went swimming and diving and turning somersaults

in the snake-foot soup till they all had aplenty. Then they all tumbled out and the head of the rats looked down the line and made motions like six sisters singing with sibilants. And they all stood in line and sang, "Button the beans to the bubbles in the bone-bag, if you can." Then the sixteen rats marched around sixteen times, once for each rat and each rat for all.

I said to Longarms when he read that one, "It is a dumb letter and he must have been a little dumb when he wrote it."

And Longarms answered, "Some are dumb, and some are dumber. The difference between the dumb and the dumber is hard to tell. When I am dumb myself I like the dumb. When I am dumber I like the dumber."

I asked Longarms, "Do you feel dumb today or dumber?"

And he said, "You want me to tell you. And I will tell you. But not now. Not in a hurry. Why should I hurry? I don't have to hurry. Hurry isn't for me. Hurry is no worry of mine.

Even if the sky begins to fall I don't hurry. It would take a long time for the sky to fall."

And he got up and went into the post office for more letters, knocking the hats off six people ahead of him, picking up their hats and saying, "Excuse me" and they saying, "Thank you" to him as he was going out of the door telling himself, "Everybody is polite today—it is like the day the sky was falling. My arms have been longer ever after, much longer ever after."

And that was the last I saw of Longarms. I have no more remembers of Longarms now.

So the Potato Face stopped telling remembers—

And the boy, Quish, asked, "Does snake-foot soup taste good if you sprinkle it with pepper and salt? And do striped rats behave better than plain rats without stripes?" While the girl, Quee, was asking, "Did they ever try locking big elephants with little locks for locking

lizards? And if the sky ever should fall down how long would it take?"

And while they were asking questions—and putting on their roller skates—the sun had gone down and the twilight had shaded into gloaming. And the old Potato Face had fallen asleep and his head hung down and his fingers were loosening from the accordion out of his hands. So they slowly took the accordion and laid it by his chair. Then Quish and Quee took off their skates and tiptoed away into the gloaming.

PIGEON FOOT

PIGEON FOOT was a boy with fast feet. And he could pick up his feet and run and catch a pigeon before the pigeon had time to get started flying.

When he held six or seven in his hands and arms and on his shoulders, he talked pigeon talk with them. They told him how they began flying with their wings and he told them how he began running with his legs and feet.

One day Pigeon Foot started running and he ran and he ran till he looked around and saw that he had run out of the Rootabaga Country.

"Where am I? Where am I?" he asked in the first town he came to. And they told him, "You are in the Egg towns among the eggs."

He noticed the houses were shells and the

people often said to each other, "Be careful when you bump me, bump me soft, bump me easy."

In the town named Plain Eggs, the first one he came to, the eggs had plain faces and talked plain talk.

In the town of Fresh Eggs, the next town, the people had fresh faces and talked fresh talk.

But in the town he came to after that, which was Boiled Eggs, he saw the soft-boiled eggs and the hard-boiled eggs looked exactly the same outside. And he couldn't tell which was which till he saw them bump.

He was saying to himself, "Why are there so many kinds of eggs? And why are not all eggs the same?" and after thinking awhile he answered what he had been asking himself, "I guess all the eggs started the same and then afterward got to be different."

The next he came to was the town of Little Funny Eggs and they were all running around

with little funny faces and making little funny talks to each other.

So he was not surprised when he came to the next town and saw the eggs had big grand faces and went around talking big grand talk to each other—he was not surprised they named their town Big Grand Eggs.

After that he ran till he came to a town where every egg had a noodle and every noodle had an egg and he said to them, "This must be the town of Egg Noodles."

"No," they said.

And Pigeon Foot answered, "You are queer eggs."

"Yes," said they. "This is the town of Queer Eggs."

And he saw one queer egg whose noodle was mixed up and different from all the other egg noodles. And he asked six questions of this queer egg. And to each question the egg answered either yes or no or, "I would rather not answer that now."

At last he asked, "What is your name?"

And the egg said, "Upstairs and Down."

"And how did your noodle get so mixed up and different from the other noodles?"

"I come from the trapeze people and I have seen many bumps, all the bumps there is, are or have been."

"Tell me about the trapeze people," said Pigeon Foot.

And Upstairs and Down said, "If you will sit down and listen and go on and on listening till I have told you what you ask to be told."

"Sure," said Pigeon Foot, "I am already listening."

"Then," said Upstairs and Down, "I shall tell you about the trapeze people."—

> If you run and run tomorrow—and the next day turn flip flops and handsprings —and the day after that turn somersaults and climb and swim and keep your fingers

crossed till you come to a horseshoe bend —then you bend yourself around the horseshoe—then you sprinkle yourself with this package of dust I give you— then you sneeze three times, look around —and you will see you are among the trapeze people.

They live in trapezes. You will notice that. Instead of building their houses on the ground they have their houses high in the air swinging on trapezes—like circus trapezes only higher.

Everybody is a trapeze actor. They have to be. When they go anywhere they jump on a trapeze and swing to where they want to go.

The mothers carry their babies around during the daytime in little trapezes. In the morning when the baby has breakfast his milk bottle swings in a little bottle trapeze just big enough to hold a bottle. The doors hang on trapezes. Even the

chimneys of the houses swing on trapezes. The only thing hard to fix is the chimney because sometimes the trapeze where the chimney is sitting swings away from under the chimney on top of the house and so the smoke has no chimney to go up out of. Then they have to run fast and find a better trapeze for that chimney to sit on.

"How do they hang all the trapezes?" asked Pigeon Foot.

"They have fasteners and hangers and they fasten one end of a fastener to a trapeze and the other end to a hanger."

"Where do they get the hangers?" asked Pigeon Foot.

"You promised to listen and go on listening," said Upstairs and Down, "yet I shall answer your question. They get the hangers the same place they get the fasteners."

"And are you going to give me the package of dust now," said Pigeon Foot, "so I can

sprinkle myself just after I bend around the horseshoe bend and just before I sneeze three times."

"I would rather not answer that now," said Upstairs and Down.

And from then on Upstairs and Down refused to answer any more questions and would only say yes or no. Pigeon Foot said, "I am sorry I was not polite. I am sorry for the way I acted. I am sorry we can not begin over again so I can show you I would act different the next time."

"Yes? No? Yes? No?" said Upstairs and Down.

And Pigeon Foot said, "I thank you for telling me as much as you did about the trapeze people. Now I must run home—and it is a long run."

On the way home he picked up his feet and caught six or seven pigeons before they had time to get started flying. And he held those six or seven pigeons in his hands and arms and

on his shoulders. And he talked pigeon talk with them and that was how he had company and wasn't lonesome on the way home back to the Rootabaga Country.

EZEKIEL

THE spotted rat, Ezekiel, had spots on its nose, spots on its back, spots running down its legs, two spots on each ear, and six long spots running to the end of its tail.

And Ezekiel had a sister with spots exactly like his. The spots were the same size and in the same places, spots on the nose, spots on the back, spots running down the legs, two spots on the ear, and six long spots running to the end of the tail.

And Ezekiel's sister's name was Hepzibah. And Ezekiel called her Hep for short. And she called him Zeke for short.

And no matter what they called each other they had spots exactly alike, the same size and in the same places.

If you looked at Zeke you might think it

was Hep. And if you looked at Hep you might think it was Zeke.

If you looked at the two spots on their ears you wouldn't know which was which. And if you counted the six long spots running to the ends of their tails you couldn't tell which was which.

And one cold winter day Zeke came running into the cozy hole under the old garage where they lived. And he told Hep he had been under the front porch of the Big House near the garage.

"What did you see?" asked Hep.

"I seen what I seen, that's what I seen, you big gazook," answered Zeke.

"I ask you politely and with good manners, what did you see?" asked Hep.

And Zeke went ahead then, politely and with good manners, telling what he had seen.

In one corner under the front porch of the Big House, he saw a Blue Fox with white stripes around its neck like a white collar, and

white stripes like stockings with white stripes running up its legs.

And this Blue Fox was taking off the stripes and putting them back on the neck like a collar. And he was taking off and putting on the white stripes running up his legs like the white stripes on stockings as he was saying, "It is early in the morning and I am getting ready to go to our Blue Fox school. I am in the first grade of the Blue Foxes. And in the first grade we all wear stripes."

And over in another corner under the front porch, was another Blue Fox buttoning on its ears with buttons, buttoning on its chin with buttons, buttoning on its toes with buttons.

And this Blue Fox was careful, taking care with every button so the ears should be buttoned on tight and not come off, buttoning on its chin careful, taking care the chin should be buttoned on tight and not come off, and buttoning on its toes careful, taking care the toes should be buttoned on tight and not come off.

And after Zeke had told Hep this about the Blue Foxes, Hep said, "It seems to me you have seen aplenty this morning with your eyes looking straight ahead."

"Yes," said Zeke. "I guess I have seen aplenty."

And both of them sat down before a long spotted looking glass and began washing their spots to see how the spots would shine in the looking glass. And the looking glass was nearly full of spots as the two spotted rats sat before it, because besides its own spots, it had all the spots of the spotted rats.

FOG WISP

ONE evening Fog Wisp stopped for a talk with the Potato Face. Her eyes were sea-green with a little of hazel-nut hazel mixed in. And her face had a pony look on it.

She told him she met four snooxes that day. And each snoox had a big windbag with a wind in it. The white snoox had the north wind, the black snoox had the south wind, the red snoox had the west wind, the green snoox had the east wind.

"I heard them talking," said Fog Wisp, "about where to let the winds loose tomorrow. They decided to let a little west wind out mixed with a little south wind and this would make a southwest wind, a soft southwest wind for tomorrow. And the day after, they decided, they would let the north wind out, the whole

bag, so the weather day after tomorrow will be cold and stormy and windy.

"I heard them go on talking and talking. If one of them needed more wind to go on talking he would untie the windbag, take a sniffer of wind, and then go on talking.

"I asked them if they never got tired being keepers of the wind. And they told me snooxes never get tired, never get hungry, never go to sleep, never wake up, never break anything, never fix anything, never buy or sell anything, never pay for anything because they never buy anything, never lose anything, never find anything, never go away without coming back, never go up without coming down, never say anything without words, never sing without opening their mouths, never sign their names without pens or pencils, never bite except with their teeth, never count their toes and fingers to see if they have as many toes as fingers.

"I asked them if it is easy to be a snoox. And they said only a snoox knows what it is to be a

snoox, and unless you are a snoox and understand snoox talk you don't know what snooxes are talking about. When two snooxes meet they ask only snoox questions and make snoox answers. That much they told me. And the way they went on talking and sniffing the wind and talking more and more yet, I am sure I could never talk like a snoox without being a snoox."

"You are a sweet child, Fog Wisp," said the Potato Face, "and I always believe what you tell me even when you are wandering in your talk and trying to make me think you are spoofing."

And he went on talking and telling Fog Wisp, "A boy came past here this morning with pants having pants pockets bigger than the pants. I asked him why he had such big pockets and he said he kept on asking his father and mother to give him bigger and bigger pants pockets until now at last the pockets were bigger than the pants."

"Maybe he could talk snoox talk if he met a snoox," said Fog Wisp.

"He told me," went on the old man, "he was down on the Shampoo river yesterday. And the bridge was full of spiffs jumping headfirst off the bridges and diving headfirst into the deep mud till their heels were deep in it. They came up, scraped the mud off with scrapers, put the scrapers in their vest pockets, and hung the vests on a fence to dry. Then they put on fresh, clean vests and dived again. He said he counted six hundred and sixty-six (666) vests hanging on the fence and two thousand two hundred and twenty-two (2,222) birds flying back and forth making new homes for themselves in the vest pockets.

"He said he asked the spiffs if it is easy to be a spiff. And they told him only a spiff knows what it is to be a spiff and unless you are a spiff and understand spiff talk you don't know what spiffs are talking about. When two spiffs

meet they ask only spiff questions and make spiff answers. He said the more he talked with them the more sure he was he could never talk like a spiff without being a spiff himself.

"Just before going away he reached down into his long, deep pants pockets and brought out five or six vests and birds flew out of the vest pockets. And he talked a kind of talk to the birds so I have a suspicion he was a little spiff himself and can talk spiff talk with any spiff he meets."

Fog Wisp patted the old man's face with both hands and said, "I have to run away now. If we live long enough maybe both of us will know snoox talk and spiff talk."

"We know a little of it already," said the old man, "and we are both young with time to learn many kinds of talk."

And Fog Wisp walked away, a dreamy look in her sea-green eyes with a little of hazel-nut hazel mixed in. And her face had a pony look on it.

CHOO CHOO AND CHIN CHIN

ONE evening in the summer time two girls came along and told the Potato Face Blind Man about the weather and how the sky was looking and how the stars were coming out, Number One, Number Two, Number Three, till the sky was filled with a million stars, too many stars to count.

"Who said you could come here this evening?" he asked them.

And they answered, "Father said we could, mother said we could, and when we asked the stars they said we could."

"You got good excuses, I don't see how you could have better excuses," the old man was murmuring.

Then he plumped out a question to the girls, "*Who are you?*"

The girls stood still. They stayed in their foot tracks. They didn't blink nor wink nor shrink. They smiled up at the sky filled with a million stars, too many to count.

One told the Potato Face, "We are the Hot Ashes sisters, Choo Choo and Chin Chin, and we live in the Hot Ashes house just around the corner."

"Yes," said the other one, "We are the Hot Ashes twins, we look like two doughnuts, like two popovers, like two hot buns just out of the oven, like two lightning bugs in the dark, like two little birds in a briary bush, like two little morning stars winking their eyes when it's time to get up in the morning."

Then both of them said, speaking together in one voice, "Yes, thank you, and if you please, that's who we are."

And the Potato Face murmured, "Oh, yes, I've heard about you Hot Ashes sisters. Wherever you go you say, 'Father said we could, mother said we could and when we asked the

stars they said we could.' You look like two shoes, two gloves, two stockings with the same stripes from toe to heel. When one of you meets the other you both say, 'Here I come, where from?' "

Now the Hot Ashes sisters had come with two little red wagons, twin wagons, and they sat down in the wagons and asked the old man, "What else did you hear about us?"

He said, "I hear that you never know where you're going till you get there. I hear that when you stand on your heads you are upside down and when you turn your feet inside you walk pigeon-toed."

"And is that all you hear?" the Hot Ashes sisters chimed. "Didn't you hear that when we go walking on a nice summer day we walk with our noses in the air? Didn't you hear that we don't know enough to come in when it rains?"

"Yes," he went on, "I hear these, those and them about you. I let it go in one ear and out of the other." And the old man ran along the

keys of his accordion, and played a tune and told the girls, "Kokomo the Kink came past here this afternoon and he was mumbling to himself and bumbling to me—and up the street and on every corner he was mumbling to himself and bumbling to other people."

"What was he mumbling and bumbling?"

"Kokomo the Kink? What was it he was mumbling and bumbling? This—

> The sack of succotash was under my right arm.
> The box of blinkers was under my left arm.
> The bag of brickbats was on my head.
> Then came the accident. Then things busted loose.
> I tripped and stumbled and fell and the sidewalk came up and hit me in the face.
> I picked myself up and I saw the sack was a box, the box was a bag, and the bag was a sack.

And the blinkers were gone, the brickbats gone, but the box, the bag and the sack were full of succotash.

"And of course," the Potato Face went on, "I couldn't let that go in one ear and out of the other."

The Hot Ashes sisters traded wagons and changed seats and asked the old man, "How long have you been here?"

And the old man sat thinking for a minute or two and then said—

"I came here the year summer never came, the year the Three-legged Hat Dancers came. Summer kept sending letters, 'I'm coming, I'm coming,' but after a while we knew summer had gone around another way.

"Spring was so late that year, and fall and the falling leaves came so early, that people called it the year summer never came.

"The hat dancers came then. Their chief was a long limber Andalusian with three legs. He

had a hat for each leg and he used to keep three hats whirling in the air while he danced on his three legs. He slept at night on the roof with all his hats on and he said, 'The rain is a good cleaner and the rain cleans me and cleans my hats at the same time.' He had horse radish for breakfast and said, 'I am a two-legged radish strong as a horse.' He danced his hat dance on a bass drum with his three feet drumming while he kept three hats in the air.

"The last thing in the dance he would take a hat and throw it around the corner as he hissed, 'Slip away, you slickers' and the hat would go around the block once, twice, three times, and start again around the corner—but this time it wouldn't come back. He lost three hats every night he danced.

"They asked him, 'Where do you get all the hats you throw away?' and he answered, 'I raise my own hats on my own hat trees on my own hat farms, since you ask me.'

"And one night a man said to him, 'We have

one-legged men, and two-legged men here but you're the first three-legged man and so we ask you, we ask you, where did you get your third leg, your leg Number Three?' And as he went on dancing and keeping three hats in the air he answered, 'It was wished on me. I raise my own hats on my own hat farms but my legs are wished on me.' "

Then the old man seemed to be thinking back and remembering old times and old things. And he said, "The day he went away he gave me a hat to remember him by and since then I have many times wished the hat dancers would come back, for that long limber Andalusian hat dancer drumming with three feet on a bass drum while he kept three hats going in the air, made me feel like dancing and throwing hats. Inside of the hat he gave me, the Andalusian wrote, 'You can have as many hats as you want to but you take whatever legs you get.' "

Now the Hot Ashes sisters both spoke at

once, "Is that a true story from beginning to end?" which made the Potato Face answer, "I can show you the hat and the writing inside—it all happened long ago in the year summer never came."

Then both the Hot Ashes sisters spoke at once, like a couple of twins thinking the same thoughts, "Tell us something you don't believe at all, or something you only half believe—if you can, if you please, if you would be so good as to make us that happy."

"Some other time, some day later on, some evening when the moon is a little round gold window and you try to look through it and see what is yonder beyond the moon, I will remember you by your voices and by the way you talk. And now tell me good night and tell me once more—*who are you?*"

They answered, "We are Choo Choo and Chin Chin, the Hot Ashes sisters, we look like two doughnuts, two lightning bugs, two little

morning stars, thank you, and if you please."

And they kissed him on the nose and he began playing a bye-bye, rock-a-bye tune on his accordion as they went away.

TRADING DREAMS

ONE evening Peter Potato Blossom came to see the Potato Face Blind Man where he sat with his accordion on the corner next nearest the post office.

When she spoke he said, "You sound like somebody singing early in the evening happy about happenings. Your voice is like a wisp of moonshine gold dipping in an evening wind. And I think you carry your head high when you walk and never knock your feet together."

She said, "You are full of compliments. I came to tell you the moon is elliptical and the moonlight mystical tonight."

"Can that be so?" asked the Potato Face. The moon is elliptical and the moonlight mystical tonight? Well! Well!"

And Peter was asking, "Have you had any

good or bad dreams lately? Any high or low dreams or any dreams about good money and bad money? Have you dreamed again about sliding up and down the toboggan to the moon? Or any dream again about the policeman with a wheelbarrow full of jewelry falling down a cistern where the goldfish helped him out?"

And the old man started telling about a dream—

I had a dream about a bus. I was the driver sitting in front holding the wheel and steering with my hands, giving her the gas, putting on the brakes and stopping the bus for a passenger. But I was always the passenger too. Whenever I stopped the bus for a passenger I was that passenger who got on. And when the passenger paid his fare I was the conductor collecting. I stopped the car for myself to get on and I collected the fare from myself. I was everything but the bus.

The first street where I drove the houses were on both sides of the street and the street ran between the houses. The next street was a long one and the houses were in the middle of the street and the street ran on both sides of the houses. And the street after that was a long one too and the houses were always either over the street or under the street so I had to drive the bus up over and down under, up over and down under all along that street.

Then we came to a street where the houses were upside down and I had to drive the bus upside down because the street too was upside down. I was dizzy from driving on that street because in front of the upside-down houses the passenger waiting for the bus always stood on his head and he wouldn't pay his fare unless the conductor stood on his head too. I got on the bus and I got off and I kept on collecting nickels and dimes from myself while I was steering the car and putting on the brakes.

At last when I woke up from my dream my

hands were full of nickels and dimes and my pockets were full of nickels and dimes and I had a bump on my head where the driver got bumped and a bump on my nose where the conductor bumped the passenger once and I had a bump over my eye where the passenger knocked the conductor down and made him stand on his head.

As the old man finished telling his dream the little girl, Peter Potato Blossom, was running her fingers through her bobs of hair and the old man asked, "Have you had any high or low dreams lately or any dreams about good money or bad money or any dreams about presents, pictures, packages, or peaches?"

Peter said, "I had a dream that wasn't a dream because I believe it happened or if it didn't happen then I made it up out of my head coming here tonight along the road where the moon is elliptical and the moonlight is mystical."

And she told what happened or what she believed happened or what she made up out of her head—

I was coming along the road when I saw three girls with nice bandages made of bandannas wrapped around their heads. They were wrapping and unwrapping their bandages. And the bandannas were shining in the moonlight.

They were hard to see but I could see them out of the corner of my eye. They started to run when they saw me. But when they saw that I saw them out of the corner of my eye they stopped running and came back.

And they wondered who I was and I wondered who they were because the moon was so elliptical and the moonlight so mystical.

I stepped off the road into the pasture where the white moonlight was coming down on the evening dew and the night mist. And I asked them, "Who are you?"

The first one said, "I, Is, is."

The second one, "I, Was, was."

And the third one, "I, Maybe, may be."

Then for the first time I noticed a box standing by the side of each one, a long white box, making a white shape in the white moonlight and the white night mist.

I asked them again, "Who are you, who did you say you are, and will you say it again? I heard you the first time, but will you say it again?"

Again they gave the same answers. Is said, "I, Is, is." Was said, "I, Was, was." And Maybe said, "I, Maybe, may be."

And the answers they gave mixed me up in my mind and I got so flustrated and so discombobulated that I stepped up to them and snapped my fingers in their faces. I didn't know what I was doing. I was doing the wrong thing. I had no right to be flustrated and discombobulated. I had asked them a nice question and they had given me nice answers and I snapped my fingers in their faces, which was the wrong

thing to do, and I did it because I was mixed up in my mind by the shining bandannas in the elliptical moon and the mystical moonlight and the three long white boxes standing on their ends making white shapes in the night mist.

I no sooner snapped my fingers in their faces than all three of the little girls, Is, Was, and Maybe, jumped into their boxes, snapped the covers tight, and all I could hear was a snizzling and a chuckling that came from the insides of the boxes.

I asked them again, softly and without snapping my fingers, "Who are you?"

And Maybe cheeped from the inside of her box, "I, Maybe, may be in here."

And Was cheeped from the inside of her box, "I, Was, was in here."

And Is, little teeny-weeny, piggly-wiggly Is, cheeped from the inside of her box, "I, Is, is in here."

And just then I knew it was getting late, I knew it was time for me to be getting along,

and I went back to the road, started along, and then said to myself, "I will go back and have one last look at Is, Was and Maybe, in their white boxes standing up in the white moonlight and the night mist."

But when I got back there I couldn't find them. They were gone. There was nothing but the white moonlight shining on the white mist and no white shapes like white boxes at all.

And when I got back to the road and started going along again, I said to myself, "It was either a dream or else it happened or else I made it up out of my head."

The Potato Face was fumbling his accordion. And he said, "It's six of one and half a dozen of the other. You can never tell what happens when the moon is elliptical and the moonlight mystical like tonight. You better run along home now."

And as Peter started home she carried her head high and never knocked her feet together.

She was more than halfway home when she nearly stumbled and was saying to herself, "It's too easy to drive a bus where the houses are on both sides of the street and the street runs between the houses. It's more fun to drive a bus where the houses are up over or down under the street and you drive the bus first up over and then down under and keep on going up over and down under."

NAPOLEON AND METHUSELAH

ONE morning when the Potato Face Blind Man sat fumbling his accordion and playing a little humpty-dumpty tune, two girls came along, one named Morningstar, the other Moongold.

They told him that every night when they went to bed they counted their pink toes to see if they had five on one foot and five on the other just the same as in the morning—and in the morning again they counted to see if they had five on one foot and five on the other the same as the evening before.

They told the old man, "We have been out where the farms are big, and the hay comes high, and the long green rambledanglers go rambling and dangling. We put on our aprons and bonnets and we took a pitchfork and we

pitched hay with the haypitchers, singing, 'Here come the haypitchers.' After the hay barns were full of hay we pitched till the farm was covered with haystacks. Then we climbed haystacks and went sliding down with our necks and backs full of hayseed and our hands and aprons full of rambledanglers. After that we climbed the paper sack trees and picked popcorn sacks."

The Potato Face put in, "Tell me about those rambledanglers."

"They ramble *up* the haystacks and dangle *down*, always either rambling or dangling. When they sleep they ramble with their front feet and dangle their hind feet. Wherever they go they take their feet along. If one of them forgets his feet the others remind him to go back and pick up his feet. They speak one word—okeh. They say okeh for good morning and good night, and if you ask them, 'Have you had breakfast?' or 'Is it going to rain today?' they answer, 'Okeh.' "

The Potato Face put in, "Is that all?"

"Yes, except they have stop bells on their back feet and go bells on their front feet. They never *stop* till the *stop* bells ring. They never *go* till the *go* bells ring."

Then Morningstar and Moongold reached into their apron pockets for boxes, unlocked the boxes and took out two rambledanglers. "One is Napoleon and one Methuselah," said the girls.

Napoleon's front feet rang go bells, and he started to go. He had been going six steps when the back feet rang stop bells. And he stopped. He whispered to himself, "Okeh."

Methuselah's back feet rang stop bells. And he started to back up and had gone six steps backward when the go bells rang. And he stopped. And he whispered to himself, "Okeh."

The girls explained, "If the *stop* bells ring first they *back up* till the go bells ring. When they want to sleep or when they want to be lazy they take off the stop and go bells and tie

them around their necks. If one rambledangler comes to another to steal bells, they stop him and ask his name and then tell him to go. But they always change the bells on his feet so he stops when he wants to go and goes when he wants to stop. Yet they hardly ever try to steal each other's bells because they are born with enough bells and if they steal bells they have too many."

And the two girls told the old blind man, "Now we are putting the rambledanglers back in the boxes. Now Napoleon and Methuselah are taking the bells off their feet and hanging them around their necks. Now they are sleeping, they will not hear any bells."

The Potato Face was fumbling around on the keys of his accordion, and turning his face up toward the blue summer sky as if he wanted to see the sky once more in hay time in the summer.

Then he laughed to those girls Morningstar and Moongold, "Do you know I'm a good deal

of a rambledangler myself? Do you know I've got stop and go bells on my hands and feet and when I want to sleep or when I want to be lazy, I take off the bells and sleep like a baby, like a lizard, like an alligator."

The two girls were knocking each other in the ribs with their elbows and saying to the old man, "We know you are a kind of rambledangler or we would never have told you about them."

The old man said, "Thank you very much. Go home and be sure to wash your ears, for clean ears are better to listen with. Thank you a thousand times. Love me a little tomorrow the same as today. Come back sometime and tell me how you climb the paper sack trees and pick popcorn sacks."

THE HONEYMOON TREE

ONE summer afternoon when the wind was blowing cool and it was good to sit in the sun and take a daydream, the Potato Face Blind Man sat sunning himself. His accordion had come loose from his hands and fallen on the sidewalk. And pieces of paper had come out of the accordion and were blowing away when his two friends, the girls Morningstar and Moongold, came along. They saw the pieces of paper had handwriting on them. They read the handwriting, which was an old, old story in that country, and it said—

On a little road to the southwest of the Village of Cream Puffs you might see the golden thumb buckwheat flowers if you come in the right time of the year.

Two white leaves run out on this flower. On one leaf is a golden thumb print of a man. On the other leaf is the golden thumb print of a woman.

If a rainstorm comes and blows the leaves off the stems the thumb prints of the two leaves stick together. Through the wet rain on the black dirt they stick together.

And afterward when they dry in the sun the white leaves turn to grey ashes and dust but the two golden thumb prints of the man and the woman, they stay as golden skeletons for many years.

There is one case of a couple of golden thumbs hanging in the sun on a high booblow tree limb where the wind had blown it—and there for a thousand years and a hundred days this couple of golden thumb prints was hanging in the sun, two little golden skeletons.

And there are stories told by men who slept for a night under this booblow tree and they say when the wind was blowing softly from the

southwest there was a singing like a man and a woman humming a soft song together.

And sometimes there were little fire lights ran along the lines of the two little golden thumbs of the man and the woman. So for those who slept under this booblow tree there was a little fire picture of two golden thumbs together humming a song up in the treetop.

And it is easy to understand why this tree was named the Honeymoon Tree and why lovers with the ringing of the wedding bells still in their ears wished to come to the Honeymoon Tree on their honeymoon trip.

Now when the Rag Doll and the Broom Handle had their wedding they decided to ride out to the Honeymoon Tree for their honeymoon. They hitched five tin horses to a wooden wagon, made a calico parasol to keep the sun off, and bought a sack of fresh roasted peanuts for a nickel a sack, and started away.

As they drove out the little road to the southwest of the village, the Rag Doll said to the

Broom Handle, "It is a sweet little road to ride on for a honeymoon. The smell of the golden thumb buckwheat flowers comes to my nose and the look of them comes to my eyes and I nearly want to cry it is so sweet to smell and so sweet to look at. Tell me. I see this road has a beginning where it begins. Can you tell me if it has an end where it ends?"

"Yes, sweetheart, I can tell you," answered the Broom Handle. "Long ago my father's mother told me about it.

"She told me this road runs to the Baby Shoe Country where the Baby Shoe Trees grow. There the fathers and mothers go together late in the year and pick the baby shoes off the trees. On trees not so big the baby slippers grow.

"Once my father's mother showed me a baby slipper blossom. It is a dark green flower with five baby toes spread on it, five baby toes spread apart like the toes of a baby on its back kicking at the sky.

"The littlest tree of all is the baby sox tree

where the baby sox grow. My father's mother said she never saw woman's fingers more beautiful than when they were picking off the baby sox trees the pink and white, yellow and blue baby sox to keep the feet of their babies warm the next winter."

And that night when the Rag Doll and the Broom Handle slept under the Honeymoon Tree looking up at the fire lights running along the lines of the two golden thumbs of the dried buckwheat flower high in blossom on the boo-blow limb, the Rag Doll asked the Broom Handle to tell her once more all about the little road that goes from the Honeymoon Tree to the Baby Shoe Country.

FLINYONS

ONE morning when the fire-tail flinyons were flying from far south to far north because it was surely spring and time to be moving, the Potato Face Blind Man sat with his accordion saying to himself he was glad he could sniff such a fine morning with so many fine smells on the wind, and he was thankful he had ears and could listen to the high cries of the fire-tail flinyons as they floated north and always north, fifteen and twenty of them formed like a flying V.

He said to himself, "We are here today and gone tomorrow—each of us is a flinyon flying north in the spring, south in the fall."

Then came the Huckabuck sisters, Liz and Lee. They heard what he said talking to himself.

"We are a couple of flinyons, too," they told him. "Can you tell us something good to hear this morning?"

"Maybe," replied the Potato Face, "and maybe not. I was remembering last night about a wooden-headed man who lived down in a Rootabaga town where the rootabagas grow bigger and bigger. He bought a little clock which he didn't know was just a baby clock. He stood it in a hallway where it kept on standing, telling the time, but all the time it was standing and telling the time it was growing bigger and bigger. After a while it was nearly to the ceiling of the hallway. And after a while it pushed through the ceiling and kept on growing till after a while it was up over the roof. Then it stopped growing. It was a grown-up clock. And now whenever people in that house want to know what time it is they have to open the door and run outdoors to look up at the clock and find out what time it is. So they are saying to each other in that family,

'The next clock we get will not be a baby clock; it will be a grown-up clock big enough to stay in the house so we can tell the time without running outdoors in the summer and the winter and the middle of the night.' "

The Huckabuck sisters stood thinking a little while after the old man ended his talk. Then they began whispering and he said they could just as well tell him what they were whispering about. And they told him—

"We went down to the ink bottle ocean this morning and watched the paper mermaids call the paper mermen to come home to a paper breakfast. They climbed out of the ink bottle ocean up on the pasteboard rocks. They stayed so long they dried and the paste fastened to them and they couldn't climb down again. Poor little paper mermaids! Poor little paper mermen!" Liz and Lee were saying. "They will never have another paper breakfast on a paper morning again! They will never talk paper talk to each other with their paper tongues any more!"

Then the two girls stood by the side of the Potato Face Blind Man, each holding one of his hands.

And none of them spoke a word or whispered as they stood there a long while and listened to the high cries of the fire-tail flinyons flying north on a spring morning, north and always north, fifteen and twenty of them formed like a flying V.

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